

The Rohingya Conflict:

An Analysis through the Lens of the Geopolitical Economy of Resources

Mostakim Bin Motaher*

Abstract

The paper aims to reveal the underlying causes behind the recent Rohingya conflict. The paper argues that, instead of only focusing on the ethnic and religious dimensions of the Rohingya conflict, the geopolitical economic dimension of the conflict also needs to be addressed properly. The conflict has a long history and it occurred in different political and economic conditions. From this angle, this research analyses the recent Rohingya conflict from the perspective of the geopolitical economy of resources. It examines the role and activities of the Government of Myanmar (GoM) and military force concerning the recent conflict. Besides, this paper also examines the geopolitical economic interests of China and India in Rakhine state with regards to their unwillingness to stop the conflict. In this study, secondary sources such as books, academic articles, reports of government and non-government organisations and the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) database have mainly been used for data collection, which is based on textual analysis. The paper applies the concept of Resource, Resource curse and Resource war along with the analytical framework of ‘Vulnerability, Risk and Opportunity’ by Philippe Le Billon as a tool to explain and analyse the conflict. The research shows that the recent violent conflicts which forcibly displaced hundreds of thousands of the Rohingyas from their houses and destroyed many Rohingya villages in Rakhine state have a possible connection with the resources and economic opportunities that are present in the Rakhine state. There is a strong possibility that the resource and economic opportunities influence the GoM and military force to become involved in this conflict. Also, the resource and economic opportunities might prevent China and India from playing an active role to stop the conflict. The Rohingya crisis has been going on for decades, yet it has not been solved. Also, there is no sign of solving the crisis soon. The geopolitical economic perspective of the conflict might be the answer as to why the Rohingya crisis has not yet been resolved.

Key Words: Rohingya Conflict, Rohingya Crisis, Geopolitical Economy, Resource War, Rakhine State, Government of Myanmar, Tatmadaw, China, India.

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Introduction

Worldwide 70.8 million people were forcibly displaced from their home because of armed conflict, generalized violence and human rights violations. These millions of stateless people have been denied national identity and fundamental rights (education, healthcare, employment and freedom of movement) (UNHCR, 2019a). According to UNHCR, 67% (Two-thirds) of all the refugees worldwide belong to only five countries: Syria, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Myanmar and Somalia (UNHCR, 2019b). The Rohingya ethnic minority group is among some of those stateless people who used to live in the Rakhine state of Myanmar. Myanmar is a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-religious country which has 135 official ethnic groups. All of these ethnic groups are aggregated in eight major ethnic groups where Bamars (32% of the total population) are the majority, and intrastate conflicts are often recorded between the Burmese military force (Tatmadaw¹) and other ethnic armed groups (Stokke et al., 2018:3-4, 46; Strömberg, 2018:6; François and Souris, 2018:12; Mithun, 2018:648). In contrast, compared to the other ethnic conflicts in Myanmar, “The Rohingya conflict is highly asymmetrical in terms of power, resources and military assets as the Rohingya population as a group has very few resources, military or otherwise”. Describing the Rohingya conflict as a two-party conflict is difficult. It is more like systematic discrimination, denial of human rights and violence, specifically against the Rohingya civilians (SIDA, 2019:2).

The conditions of the Rohingyas were not always like this. They were the citizens of Myanmar before 1962. Even they were elected as the members of the parliament, worked in the government offices and military once (Martin et al., 2017:5). But the situation deteriorated periodically, and now they are not even recognised as the citizens of Myanmar (Cheesman, 2017). The Rohingyas have a long history of being victims of mass violence and military crackdown. It occurred in different periods, notably in 1978, 1991, 1992, 2012, 2015, 2016 and 2017 (Habib, M. et al., 2018:2). These violent incidents ultimately forced hundreds of thousands of Rohingyas to abandon their houses in the Rakhine state (UNHCR, 2018a; IOM, 2019; MSF, 2018). However, one point to be noticed here is that the violence of 1978, 1991, 1992 occurred under an economically sanctioned military government where factors relating to ethnic and religious differences played the pivotal role in the conflicts (Rahman, 2015:289-290; Mithun, 2018). On the other hand, the violence of 2012, 2015, 2016 and 2017 occurred under a relatively open economic democratic government, which had different political and economic conditions compared to the ones in previous conflicts (Garbo, 2016; Hadar, 1998).

Despite having these different political and economic conditions, most scholars and observers continue to almost exclusively focus on the ethnic and religious related causes of the conflict. Also, these are the most common perceptions of general people when they hear about Rohingya conflict (Azad & Jasmin, 2013; Kipgen, 2014; Rahman, 2015; Ibrahim, 2016; Goraya and Mazhar, 2016; Mithun, 2018). According to Sassek’s (2017) opinion “The world’s coverage of

¹ In this study, I use the term ‘Tatmadaw’ and ‘Military force’ interchangeably without indicating any special differences. The term ‘Tatmadaw’ is the vernacular name of Myanmar’s tri-service (army, navy and air force). In general, Tatmadaw only refers to the army; however, it is a combination of army, navy and air force. It also considered as a royal force in Myanmar (Seth, 2018).

these events has focused entirely on the religious/ethnic aspect, characterising them as religious persecution”. However, recently some scholars addressed the geopolitical economic aspect of the recent Rohingya conflict in their writings (Bepler 2018:9; Fair, 2018; Ware and Laoutides, 2018:201; Sassek’s, 2017). In that respect, some aspects of this conflict can still be seen as under-researched. Especially the resources and economic opportunities that are present in Rakhine state need in-depth examination concerning the recent Rohingya conflict. In other words, the resource factor had its great influence on forced displacement of Rohingya people from the Rakhine state. Therefore, this study is approaching the recent Rohingya conflict from the perspective of the geopolitical economy of resources.

Research Relevance and Importance

Millions of people become stateless every year. However, the reasons for being forcibly displaced or stateless are not the same in every case. People might be forcibly displaced, or turned stateless due to war, conflict or climate change etc. Around one million Rohingya people are now living in inhuman conditions in some camps of Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh (UNHCR, 2019c; IOM, 2019; MSF, 2018). Among them, around 723000 Rohingya people fled to Bangladesh only in August 2017 to August 2018. These people joined the other 213000 people who fled to Bangladesh in different periods since 1978 (UNHCR, 2019c; ECHO, 2018; SIDA, 2019). Several organisations including UNHCR, MSF, Amnesty International reported mass killings, rapes, destruction of houses in Rakhine state against the Rohingya civilian population (UNHCR, 2018a; MSF 2018; Amnesty International, 2017). By observing the situation, the UN human rights chief described it as a ‘textbook example of ethnic cleansing’ (UN News, 2017). Many governments and international organisations reports described the Rohingya crisis as a human tragedy, a humanitarian crisis with serious humanitarian consequences (ECHO, 2018; HoC, 2018; SIDA, 2019). After observing the whole situation, Ibrahim (2016:3) said, if this kind of violence which is happening with the Rohingyas is left unchallenged then sooner or later we will see another Rwandan genocide. Also, as highlighted by the US Congressional Research Service report 2017, the displaced Rohingya people in Bangladesh are at high risk of radicalisation. These displaced Rohingya people can be recruited by ARSA² or any other Islamist militant group (Martin et al., 2017). Therefore, it is important to solve the crisis as soon as possible.

Research Objectives

The most common reason given for the Rohingya conflict is ethno-religious related factors. However, recently, a few types of research consider the geopolitical economic factors of the conflict, which needs further comprehensive investigation. Therefore, the objective of this research paper is to examine the recent Rohingya conflict, through the lens of geopolitical economy of resources. Especially, to find out the causes behind the rise of violence and destruction of Rohingya villages in the Rakhine state. Also, to examine the role of the Myanmar

² Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), is an armed organization (Myanmar Government labelled them as a terrorist group) who claim to defend the rights of the region’s predominately Muslim Rohingya minority, and an allegedly excessive military response by Burma’s military (Martin et al., 2017).

government and military force, China and India in the recent Rohingya conflict from the same lens.

Research Methodology

To fulfil the objective and purpose of the study, this research is designed as a desk study utilising both abductive and case study method. Secondary sources such as books, academic articles, government and non-government organisations reports, policy briefs and newspaper articles have been used for qualitative data collection based on text analysis. Also, to compare the number of violence (State-Based Violence, Non-State Violence, One-Sided Violence) in different states of Myanmar, UCDP Database has been used for data collection based on text analysis.

Structure of the Paper

To get an overview of how the paper is constructed, the structure of the paper is presented here. The **first section** of this paper consists of two parts. In the first part, it discusses the concept of Resource, Resource Curse and Resource Wars. In the second part, it presents the analytical framework ‘Vulnerability, Risk and Opportunity’ introduced by Phillip Le Billon. The **second section** presents the findings in three parts. First it presents an overview of the Rakhine state which shows geographical importance of Rakhine state and the natural resources that reserved in the Rakhine state. Secondly, it presents the geopolitical economic significance of Rakhine state to the different actors. Thirdly, it presents the increasing number of violence in Rakhine state and the destruction of the Rohingya villages in the Rakhine state. In the **third section**, the analysis of the findings is presented by using the analytical framework of Le Billon. In the end, the **fourth section** presents the concluding discussion, where it highlights the findings and the analysis of the paper once again and emphasizes on the importance of this research.

1 Conceptual and Analytical framework

In this section, the conceptual and analytical framework is presented as a tool to understand and analyse the geopolitical economic perspective of Rohingya conflict. Firstly, I look into the concept of Resource, Resource Curse and Resource Wars, which will help to understand what type of resources and how resources can influence a conflict. Then, at last, I present the analytical framework of Le Billon.

1.1 Concepts of Resource, Resource Curse, Resource Wars

1.1.1 Resource

Resources can be differentiated by their spatial location, relative abundance, physical characteristics, technologies of extraction and transformation, use, social and environmental impacts and economic value (Le Billon, 2012:10). The two broad categories of natural resources are renewable resources (cropland, forests and water) and non-renewable resources (diamonds, minerals, oils) (USIP, 2007:4). Moreover, resources can also be categorised by its distinctive characteristics, ‘control’ and ‘access’. The characteristics of ‘control’ define resources as proximate and distant. Proximate resources are close to the centre of power, under the control of the government. On the other hand, distant resources are located in remote places,

mostly in border areas where politically marginalised groups live. Moreover, the characteristics of ‘access’ define resources as point and diffuse. Point resources are concentrated in small areas and usually exploited by capital-intensive extractive industries. For example, minerals and oils. Conversely, diffuse resources spread over large areas and usually exploited by less capital-intensive industries such as alluvial gems, minerals, timber, agricultural products, fish (Le Billon, 2012:28).

1.1.2 Resource Curse

In general, natural resources were perceived as countries’ assets, part of natural capital, and countries which hold a considerable amount of natural resources are considered as fortunate (Davis and Tilton, 2005:233). However, as explained by Collier (2008:38), discovery of natural resource wealth can be a catalyst to prosperity, but it can also contribute to the conflict trap. The status of natural resources as a driver of economic development in the 1980s has changed dramatically and from the 1990s natural resource is coined with the term ‘natural resource curse’ (Brunnschweiler and Bulte, 2009:651). The term ‘resource curse’ usually refers to those countries, which have a lot of resources (renewable and non-renewable) but do not get any benefit from it (NRGI, 2015:1). In many countries, the resource can be the reason for conflict, corruption and poverty (Collier and Hoeffler, 2005:624; Le Billon, 2001; Mittelman, 2017).

1.1.3 Resource Wars

In the 1980s, the term ‘Resource wars’ drew the attention of the world as a geopolitical device to explain and exacerbate renewed tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union over the control of fuel and minerals in disputed peripheries (Patey, 2010 as cited in Le Billon, 2012:12). The conventional geopolitical perspective defines resource wars ‘as armed conflicts which revolved around the “pursuit or possession of critical materials”’, (Klare, 2001 as cited by Le Billon, 2012:12). It is a type of conflict (war) where violence becomes an inherent part of the political economy of resource exploitation (Le Billon, 2000:26).

Similarly, Heywood (2014:414) defines resource war as “A war that is fought to gain or retain control of resources which are important to economic development and political power”. In the Post-Cold War period, armed conflict was characterised by a specific political ecology closely linked to the geography and political economy of natural resources (Le Billon, 2001:561). Economic agendas linked with exploitation of resources can influence the course of a conflict. Besides that, financial self-interest also motivates individual soldiers, local commanders and their political backers to sustain the conflicts. In the same way, resource wealth (financial benefits) has an impact on the international community. Due to the financial benefits from the resource wealth, international community often lacks cohesion, willingness or leverage to stop the conflict. In particular, access to resource works as a divisive factor among international actors (Le Billon, 2001:578). Additionally, the value or financial benefits of resources were used to win or sustain a conflict. It can be used to buy arms, commercial exchanges and many other illicit things (Le Billon, 2000:26-27).

Moreover, resource involvement (extraction or production) can change the nature of violence. For example, with extractive resources (mineral, oil, gas) violence will take a form of war

between states or at least a territorial seizure. On the other hand, with productive resources (agriculture) violence will take a structural form such as coercing labour or controlling trade (Le Billon, 2000:26). Similarly, both non-renewable resources and renewable resources can provoke conflict. Non-renewable resources are apparently connected to conflict through resource abundance and renewable resources connected to conflict through resource scarcity (Koubi et al. 2014:227).

Furthermore, resource gained a new status, which is called 'Strategic Resource'. Many countries get involved in a conflict over the pursuit or possession of critical materials (Le Billon, 2004:1). As seen in the past, resources provided the mean and motive of global European expansion, the focus of interstate rivalry and strategic denial of access (Le Billon, 2004:5). Foreign interventions which may turn into any kind of armed conflict can also occur due to the control over strategic resources such as oil or mineral deposits and to secure major commercial and strategic interests (Le Billon, 2012:44). Moreover, to get access to the resources, external actors can intervene in secessionist attempts by manipulating local political identities (Le Billon, 2012:36).

1.2 Analytical Framework

In this part, I explained the analytical framework 'Vulnerability, Risk and Opportunity' which was developed by Phillip Le Billon (Le Billon, 2012:24-28). Le Billon is a professor at the University of British Columbia who has conducted many types of research concerning geopolitical economy of resources. In his book, *Wars of Plunder: Conflicts, Profits and the Politics of Resources*, he strongly argues that 'resource sectors influence the likelihood and course of armed conflicts'. Further, he added that some resources make wars 'more likely, nasty and lengthy' and on the worse side, these conflicts turn assets into liabilities (Le Billon, 2012:4). In this analytical framework, Le Billon (2012:24) presents three arguments; "resource curse" "resource conflict" and "conflict resources". Also, he divided these three arguments into two parts, 'Rethinking the resource curse: Conceptualising vulnerability' and 'Resource conflict and conflict resources: Conceptualising risk and opportunity' to explain how resource influence war. These are taken up for discussion below.

In the first part, *Rethinking the resource curse: Conceptualising vulnerability*, Le Billon presents the first argument "resource curse". According to this perspective, resource dependence creates a situation which makes society more vulnerable to armed conflict through its negative impact on the economy and weak governance system. Principally, economic shocks and weak governance increase the risk of armed conflicts (Le Billon, 2012:24-25).

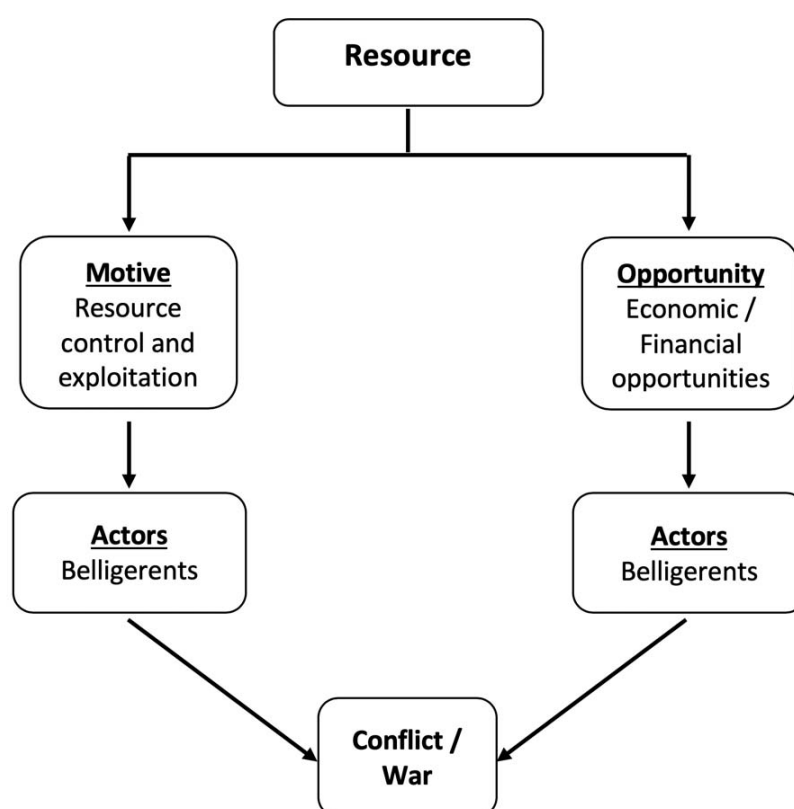
The second part, *Resource conflict and conflict resources: Conceptualising risk and opportunity* presents the other two perspectives "resource conflict" and "conflict resources". "Resource conflict" suggests that resource control and exploitation raise the risk of large-scale armed conflicts and can lead to war. It linked resources with specific conflicts such as livelihood conflicts which occurred mostly over the access of renewable resources. Also, it connected resources with occurrences of violence such as the militarisation of resource areas, pollution or

labour abuses. Besides that, these occurrences of violence are primarily related to non-renewable resources (Le Billon, 2012:26).

Moreover, the “conflict resource” perspective linked resources with specific opportunities (mostly financial opportunities) to the belligerents. Some resources have financial opportunities which are more prone to armed conflicts. These resources are sustaining and motivating war than the other resources (Le Billon, 2012:27). Further, regarding the risks of generating armed conflict and creating financial opportunities for the combatants, ‘resource conflicts’ and ‘conflict resources’ are complementary in their respective focus (Le Billon, 2012:27). Notably, in the case of this study “resource conflict” and “conflict resources” are much related.

From the above discussion, it can be seen that resources can provide both motive (resource control and exploitation) and opportunity (economic/financial opportunities) to the actors (belligerents) for involving in a conflict. In the following figure, I summarise the analytical framework of Le Billon’s and try to analyse it in a way which will help to fulfil this research objective (see figure 1).

Figure 1: Analytical Framework— Vulnerability, risk and opportunity



Source: On the basis of Le Billon’s (2012:24-28) analytical framework ‘Vulnerability, risk and opportunity’.

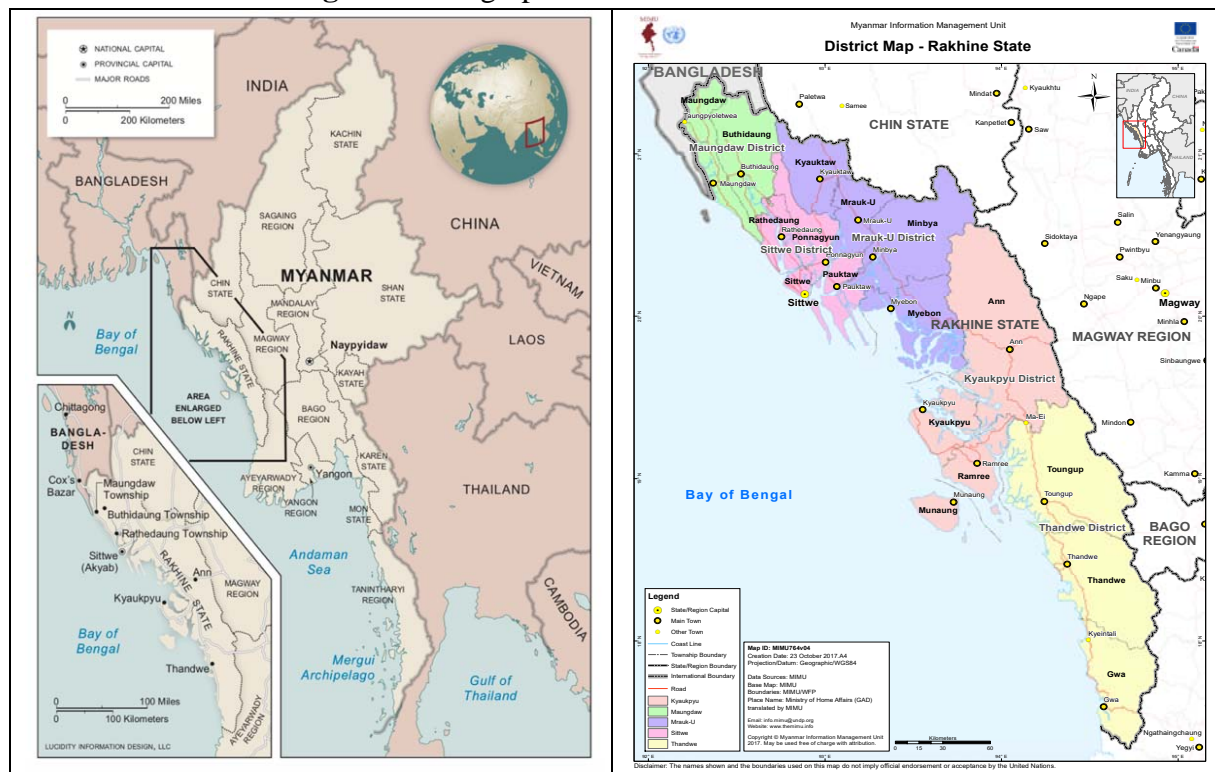
2 Findings

In this section, the findings of the study are presented descriptively. The findings are divided into three parts. At first, it presents an overview of the Rakhine state along with the geographical location, natural resources and economic opportunities that are vested in Rakhine state. Secondly, it presents the geopolitical economic interests of the GoM, Military force, China and India. At last, it presents the growing number of violence and destruction situation that occurred in the Rakhine state.

2.1.1 Geographical location of the Rakhine state and its importance

Rakhine state (also known as Arakan until 1989) is located in the western part of Myanmar. It covers an area of 36778 square kilometres (14200 square miles). Estimated population of Rakhine state is 3.3 million (before the forced displacement of Rohingya people), among them the Rakhine Buddhist are the majority but other ethnic and religious groups are also living in this state (Mithun, 2018:652; MIC, 2019:53; ENAC, 2017:15; Martin et al., 2017:5).

Figure 2: Geographical location of Rakhine state.

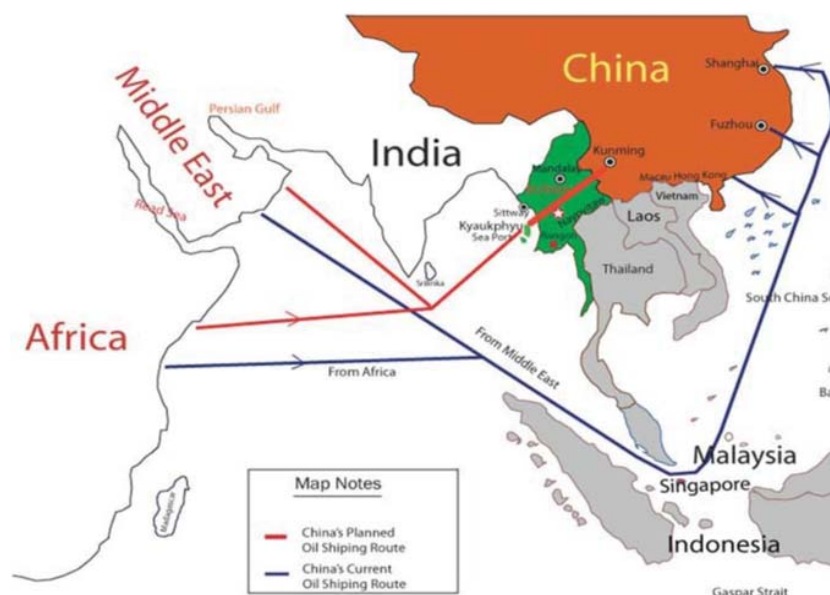


Source: Myanmar on left (MIMU, 2015) and Rakhine state on right (Selth, 2018:7).

The Rakhine state holds a unique geographical position which connects South Asia to South-east Asian countries. It carries above 360 miles long strategic coast, which gives passage to the Indian ocean. Additionally, this state provides a political and economic corridor to Myanmar for connecting with the countries of Africa, the Middle-east and India (MIC, 2019:37). This state is located near the Malacca Strait, which is viewed as one of the most strategic natural waterways. It has a critical strategic and commercial link between the Middle-east and East-Asia. Also, it is a strategic supply route for the USA as it connects the US military bases of the

Pacific and the Middle-east (Steinberg, 2010 cited in Goraya and Mazhar, 2016:27). Moreover, this strategic geographical location on the Bay of Bengal and abundance of resources make the Rakhine state an economically strategic area, which creates investing competition between the international community (ENAC, 2017:56).

Figure 3: Geographical location of Rakhine state.



Source: Arakan Oil Watch cited in ENAC, 2017:55.

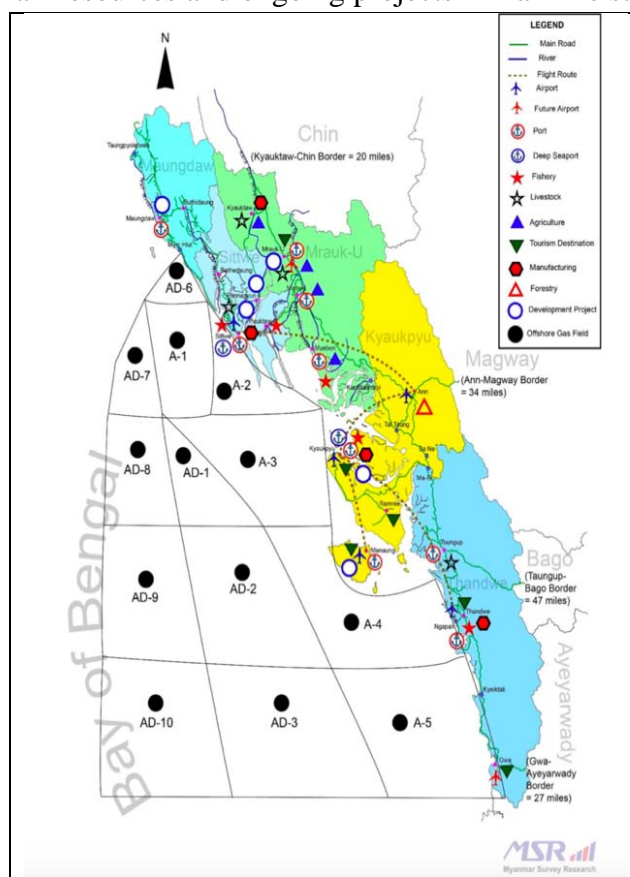
2.1.2 Natural Resources and economic opportunities in the Rakhine state

The Rakhine state holds large economic potentials with abundance in natural resources such as oil, natural gas and maritime resources (MIC, 2019:40). According to the US Energy Information Administration, Myanmar has estimated 10 trillion (now) cubic feet of proven gas reserves and an estimated 50 million barrels of proven oil reserves (UKTI, 2015:3). In total, 105 oil and gas fields are discovered in Myanmar, 54 onshore and 51 offshore fields. Notably, among those 105 oil and gas fields, 25 oil and gas fields (23 offshore oil and gas fields and two onshore oil and gas fields) are situated in the region of Rakhine state (MIC, 2019:99; EUROCHAM Myanmar, 2018:16). The Shwe gas project which is situated in Rakhine state is considered as one of the four offshore gas projects which brings the most income to Myanmar in export. The daily production rate of the Shwe gas field is 500 million cubic feet (EUROCHAM Myanmar, 2018:17). Besides natural resources, there are vast economic opportunities for investors in many sectors in the Rakhine state. For example, recently, Myanmar Survey Research (MSR) named some potential business sectors for the investors within the Rakhine state. Some of them are fisheries and livestock, agriculture, manufacture, energy and many others (MIC, 2019:13). In the past, the state's economy was dependent on agriculture and fisheries only. However, the recent discovery of oil and gas brings a massive amount of foreign investment in the state (ENAC, 2017:15).

The situation changed, especially after 2008, when the Constitution was amended, and a few investment laws have been passed and modified such as the Foreign Investment Law 2012, the Myanmar Citizen Law 2013 and the Myanmar Special Economic Zone Law 2014. Further, when the newly elected NLD government came into power in 2016, they passed the Myanmar Investment Law, which updated both the Foreign Investment Law 2012 and Myanmar Citizen Law 2013 (ENAC, 2017:15). Besides that, the EU and the US lifted economic sanctions which made the way clearer for the investors in investing within Myanmar (Garbo, 2016; Hadar, 1998; Martin et al., 2017:22). The effect can be monitored through the oil sectors. Before 2012, only a few international oil companies were operating in Myanmar because the US imposed economic sanctions (Vakulchuk, 2017 cited in Stokke, K. et al., 2018:39). However, after lifting the sanctions in 2012, companies like British Gas, Chevron, ConocoPhillips, ENI, Oil India, Ophir, Petro Vietnam, Shell, Statoil, Total and Woodside all came into Myanmar (NRGI, 2016 cited in Stokke, K. et al., 2018:39).

Furthermore, there are also some significant projects (Special Economic Zone, Trading Zone, Industrial Zone) running in the Rakhine state, including two international projects. These projects, on the one hand, create substantial investment opportunities for the investors and on the other hand, have substantial economic benefits to the domestic and international actors (see figure 4) (MIC, 2019: 103-112).

Figure 4: Natural Resources and ongoing projects in Rakhine state.



Source: MIC, 2019:15.

2.2 Geopolitical economic interests of GoM, Military force, China and India

2.2.1 Government of Myanmar's and Military Force's interest

Myanmar is a unitary parliamentary system of government with seven states and seven regions (The World Factbook, 2019). The amended 2008 Constitution makes the country a multiparty democratic system, but the military still holds substantial political power (Selth, 2018:11; The Economist, 2017). This amended Constitution contains several provisions that safeguard continued power for the military (EgretEAU 2014; Williams 2014, cited in Stokke, K. et al., 2018:9). The military gets several key positions in the government such as the Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Border Affairs and Ministry of Defence (Stokke, K. et al., 2018:14). In terms of controlling and managing the natural resources from all the ethnic regions, the Central government has the foremost authority. For example, the government controlled the natural gas of Rakhine state and Tanintharyi Region and the entire forests of the country. Similarly, the hydropower that is produced in Karenni (Kayah) state, gemstones from Shan state, jade and gold from Kachin state are also directly controlled by the Central government (ENAC, 2017:13). According to the 2008 Constitution, Article 37 (a-b), "The Union is the ultimate owner of all the lands and all natural resources above and below the ground, above and beneath the water and in the atmosphere in the Union. The Union shall enact necessary law to supervise extraction and utilization of State-owned natural resources by economic forces." (ENAC, 2017:15). According to the findings of the Asia Foundation, state and regional government do not have precise control over the resources. They only have the management power and tax over some resources such as salt and forest products (ENAC, 2017:17).

Moreover, the Rakhine state is one of those states which earned a lot of foreign revenues for Myanmar as a whole through its natural resources and different large-scale investment projects. Despite this fact, Rakhine is the second poorest and least developed after Chin state (François and Souris, 2018:17; ENAC, 2017:55; Mithun, 2018:652). The government controls all the gas and oil fields by Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE) under the Ministry of Electricity and Energy (ENAC, 2017:17, 56). Also, the officials of MOGE are former and current generals and military officers connected to Tatmadaw. They are in charge of exploration, production and distribution of the resources. MOGE is also blamed for land grabbing and threatening the farmers for the Myanmar-China oil and gas pipeline project (ENAC, 2017:58-59). Furthermore, the report "Natural resources of Myanmar (Burma)" highlighted that the military force (Tatmadaw) plays a vital role in the extraction, production and sale of natural resources. The Tatmadaw also monopolises and dominates the MOGE. Moreover, the officers of Tatmadaw under the Ministry of Defence are involved in the resource extraction and received illicit benefits from the resources (ENAC, 2017:14). Sassen (2017) also identified similar things. Her research, based on the reports of "Displacement and Dispossession: Forced Migration and Land Rights in Burma" and "Commercial Agriculture Expansion in Myanmar: Links to Deforestation, Conversion Timber, and Land Conflicts" shows that the military force is involved in the land grabbing from the smallholders since 1990s. According to her findings "At the time of the 2012 attacks, the land allocated to large projects had increased by 170% between 2010 and 2013. By 2012 the law governing land was changed to favour large corporate acquisitions". She added that persecution of the Rohingyas and other ethnic minorities could

be influenced by the military economic interests rather than ethnic and religious issue (Sassen, 2017).

Notably, as an underdeveloped state, there is job unavailability in the Rakhine state, and the local Rakhine people have a perception that the Rohingyas are stealing their jobs (Mithun, 2018:653). They perceived the Rohingya people as an economic threat as in the past Rohingyas dominated the small local business such as fisheries, produce markets, informal financial services, trading persons (Goraya and Mazhar, 2016:37). The Burmese elite perceived the Rohingya people as an economic burden and competition for current jobs and businesses (Wolf, 2015).

2.2.2 China's interest

China is the largest investors in Myanmar. Since 1988/89 to 2018, 297 Chinese enterprises invested around 20,353.528 million USD, which is 25.92% of the total FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) of Myanmar (MIC, 2019:27). Also, China is the largest arms supplier (2014-18) to Myanmar too (Pieter, D. et al. 2019:6; Asrar, S. 2017). China is always supportive of the Myanmar regime as they need safeguards for its massive investments (Ibrahim, 2016:73; Joy, 2018). It can be seen from the past that Chinese investment projects are fuelling disputes about land ownership across Myanmar. The escalation of conflicts and tensions in Kachin and Shan states is also linked with Chinese infrastructure projects. Moreover, the new perception of China towards Myanmar is that they see Myanmar 'as the bridge to the Bay of Bengal and the waters beyond' (Ibrahim 2016:73). China's main interest in Rakhine is economical, and they are doing many projects in the Rakhine state (Joy, 2018:2).

2.2.2.1 Belt and Road Initiative

In 2013, China's president Xi Jinping announced the land-based Silk Road Economic Belt and the sea-based 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, which combinedly known as Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) or One Belt, One Road (OBOR) (Yu, 2017:117). China already allocated (reportedly) more than 900 billion US dollar through the Chinese and International financial institutions to many infrastructure projects associated with the BRI and Myanmar is a big part of it (Yu, 2017:117, 120; Blanchard, 2018:329). Specifically, in Kyaukpyu (a coastal town in Rakhine state), China built a deep-sea water port, a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) and Oil and Gas Pipeline. Also, there are more upcoming projects in the queue such as China- Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC), Kunming-Kyaukpyu railway project. All these projects are part of China's Belt and Road Initiative (Blanchard, 2018:333, 339; Martin et al., 2017:19-20).

2.2.2.2 Oil and Gas field and Myanmar-China Oil and Gas Pipe line

Rakhine state generated a high amount of foreign revenue for Myanmar by exporting oil and natural gas to China (ENAC, 2017:55). In Myanmar, Chinese companies are extracting oil and gas from five specific blocks AD-1, AD-6, AD-8, M-10 and PSC-F. Among those five blocks, three are situated in Rakhine state. China's state-owned company, China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), extracted oil and gas from the block AD-1, AD-6 and AD-8 (MIC, 2019:99; EUROCHAM Myanmar, 2018: 39-44). Also, China built an oil and gas pipeline and

twelve mega oil storage tanks in Kyaukphyu, Rakhine State, to store and transfer the oil that will be bought from the Middle East and Africa (ENAC, 2017:56).

Figure 5: Myanmar-China Oil and Gas pipe line



Source: Shwe Gas Movement cited in ENAC, 2017:56

The Myanmar-China Oil and Gas Pipeline (also known as Sino-Myanmar pipeline) originated from Rakhine state. Around 770 kilometres (480 miles) long, this pipeline started from Kyaukphyu, Rakhine state of western Myanmar and ended in Kunming, Yunnan Province of southern China. The pipeline goes through total 21 townships of Rakhine state, Magway Region, Mandalay Region, and Shan States (ENAC, 2017:56; Reuters, 2017; Beining; ENAC, 2017:57). The oil pipeline can transport 22 million tons of oil, and natural gas pipeline can transport 12 billion cubic meter gas annually (Beining, 2017). Moreover, this pipeline saves a lot of energy import cost for China (ENAC, 2017:59). As China imported a massive amount of crude oil every year from the Middle-east and Africa, this pipeline will help to supply the crude oil from the Middle-east and Africa to China without using the Malacca Strait and the South China Sea. It is a significant part of China's Belt and Road Initiatives (Funairole and Hillman 2018:4; South China Morning Post, 2017).

2.2.2.3 SEZ and Deep-Sea port in Kyaukphyu and CMEC and others

The Kyaukphyu SEZ is situated on the Ramree Island, south part of Kyaukphyu town in Rakhine State. The first phase of this project includes a deep-sea port, industrial park and a residential area (MIC, 2019:103). China's state-owned company, China International Trust Investment Corporation (CITIC), got the tender of making the Kyaukphyu Special Economic Zone (SEZ) and a deep-sea port in 2015 (Lee and Aung, 2017). The Kyaukphyu deep-sea port project is part of China's Maritime Silk Road Initiative, which also includes the port of Gwadar in Pakistan; Hambantota in Sri Lanka in large (Funairole and Hillman 2018:2; Green, 2018:1). The estimated value of the port project is 7.3 billion, and the SEZ is 2.7 billion USD. According to the deal, CITIC will build the port and run the project for 50 years with a possible extension

of another 25 years (Poling, 2018:5). Furthermore, China also signed an agreement with Myanmar to build 1700 kilometres (approximately) long China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC), which will connect China's landlocked Yunnan province through Mandalay to Kyaukphyu and Yangon (Lwin, 2018).

2.2.3 India's interest

India maintains a close relationship with Myanmar, especially after 2011, when Myanmar entered the path of democracy. Since then, the relationship between the two-neighbour countries got much better (Saint-Mézard, 2016:185). Myanmar's transition to democracy ease several difficulties (withdrawal of economic sanctions) and create new opportunities, and since then Myanmar becomes a significant trading opportunity for India (Ibrahim, 2016:73; Dutta, 2018:3). Although like China, India is not the largest investor in Myanmar, but India also invested a considerable amount (from 1988/89 to 2018 is 763.567 million USD) in Myanmar (MIC, 2019:27). Moreover, Indian companies are holding stakes in the Shwe gas field in Rakhine state and plan to build a cross-border pipeline (Yhome, 2018:3). Also, Indian companies are extracting oil and gas from four offshore blocks YEB, M-17, M-18, M-4 and three onshore blocks PSC-I, EP-3, PSC-B2 (EUROCHAM Myanmar, 2018: 39-44). According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), India is also Myanmar's one of the top arms suppliers. They sell military aircraft, artillery, naval vessels and much other combat types of equipment to the military force of Myanmar (Choudhury, 2019; Asrar, 2017).

2.2.3.1 Act East Policy

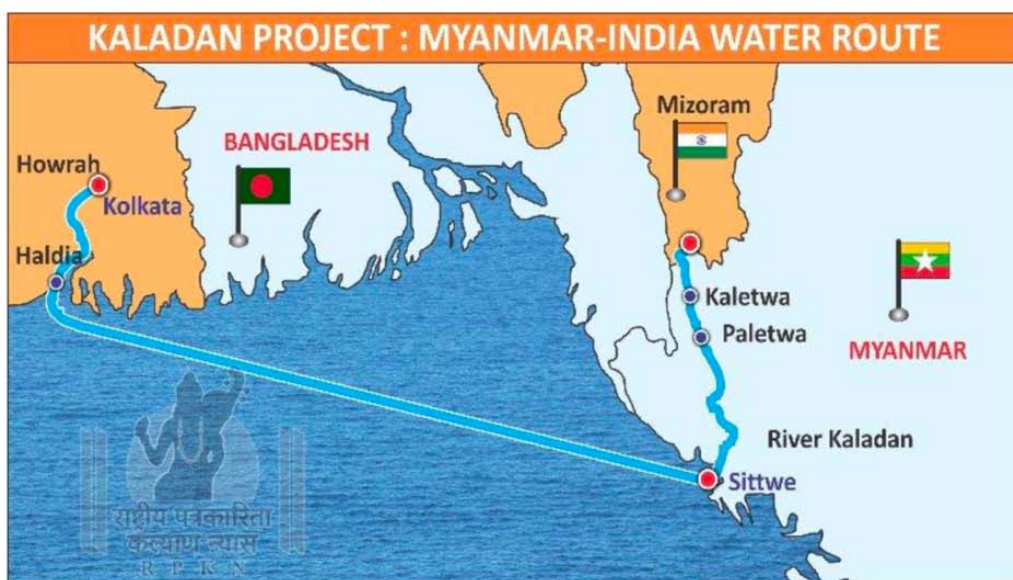
In 2014, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the 'Act East Policy' in the ASEAN summit in Myanmar. This announcement came just one year after China's 2013 BRI's announcement. Act East Policy is mainly driven by economic and security interests and it mainly modified the 1992's 'Look East Policy' which only focused on the economic interests in Southeast Asia (Saint-Mézard, 2016:178; Palit, 2016:1; Sajjanhar, 2016:1; Martin et al., 2017:19-20). With the Act East Policy, India wants to create close relationships with the ASEAN countries as well as the other Asia Pacific countries. Also, it will integrate the North Eastern Region of India. Remarkably, Myanmar is at the centre of the current Indian governments 'Act East' trade policy and holds an essential geostrategic position in India's vision of ties with ASEAN states (Mohan 2017:103; Sajjanhar, 2016:2; Ramya, 2018). Therefore, to fulfil this vision, India already started and developed many projects such as the the Kaladan Multimodal Transport Project, India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway, Rhi-Tiddim and Rhi-Falan Roads (Ziipao, 2018:481-483; Saint-Mézard, 2016:183; Sajjanhar, 2016:1-3; Dutta, 2018:3).

2.2.3.2 Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project

The Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project is strategically important for both the governments of India and Myanmar. This project includes shipping, inland water and road transport. Moreover, India is funding this project (MIC, 2019:107). It will connect the port of Kolkata in India and the port of Sittwe in Rakhine. India already developed the Sittwe port; and from Sittwe port, it will continue to Mizoram, India by road (Sajjanhar, 2016:3). The project

started in 2008 and presents a massive opportunity for both India and ASEAN countries (Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region; Sajjanhar, 2016:3). The Government of India's purpose of doing this project is to create a transport connection between India's eastern littoral and landlocked Northeast region through Myanmar (Saint-Mézard, 2016:178).

Figure 6: Kaladan Multi Modal Transit Transport project



Source: MIC, 2019:107.

2.2.3.3 India–Myanmar–Thailand highway and Rhi–Tiddim and Rhi–Falan Roads

India is also building and improving the India–Myanmar–Thailand trilateral highway which will connect the Tamu–Kalewa– Kalemryo Road also known as the ‘Friendship Road’. The approximate length of this trilateral highway is 1400 kilometres. It will link the Northeast region of India with South-east Asia through Myanmar and Thailand. Also, it is expected to boost trade and commerce in the ASEAN-India Free Trade Area (Ziipao, 2018:481-482; Sajjanhar, 2016:2). Moreover, India is building and upgrading the Rhi–Tiddim (agreed in 2010 to build this road at the cost of \$60 million) and Rhi–Falam roads in Myanmar which will connect the Mizoram state with Rih (Rihkahwdar) in Myanmar (Ziipao, 2018:482).

Along with vast economic interests, there are many other geopolitical concerns which urge India to get engaged closely with Myanmar. India has both a competitive and, in some cases, conflictual relationship with China. India is always worried about Chinese expansion in its backyard (Fair, 2018:73). In 1962, these two countries got involved in a war over the border issue at Arunachal Pradesh. Also, they compete over political influence, hydrocarbon sources, sea lanes access, commercial markets and business opportunities in East Africa and Asia. Besides, China always supported and backed Pakistan, for example, on UN sanctions over terrorist outrages in India (Fair: 2018:73-74). Also, China built several ports nearby Indian territory such as Gwadar in Pakistan (part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), Hambantota in Sri Lanka; and Kyaukpyu in Myanmar (Funairole and Hillman 2018:2; Kanwal, 2018:12). Also, India perceived the BRI's flagship project China-Myanmar Economic Corridor

(CMEC) as a breach to their sovereignty which connects China's Xinjiang autonomous region with Pakistan's Baluchistan province and runs through the contested territory of Kashmir (Pant and Passi, 2017:89; Dutta, 2018:1). As a protest to China's CMEC, India boycotted both of the Belt and Road Forums (BRF) meeting in 2017 and 2019 (The Times of India, 2019).

2.3 Increase of violence and destruction of Rohingya villages in Rakhine state

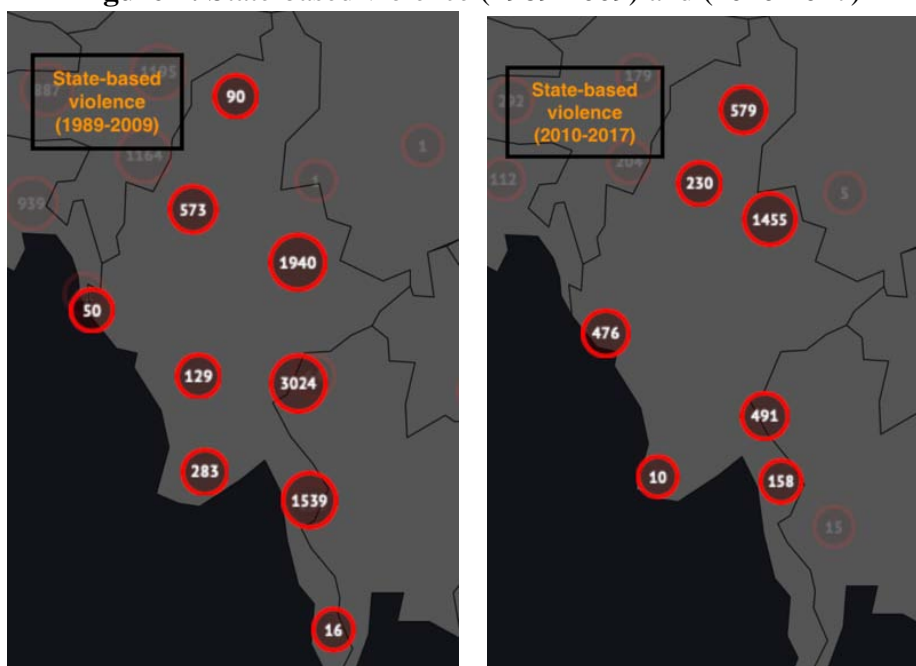
2.3.1 The increasing numbers of violence in the Rakhine state

From the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) database, the number of State-Based Violence, Non-state violence and One-sided violence all over Myanmar, including the Rakhine state are presented below.

2.3.1.1 State-Based Violence

Concerning the State-based violence³ in the Rakhine state (figure 7) from 1989 to 2009 (left side map), over twenty years, the number of violence was recorded 50 and the actors who were involved in these outbreaks of violence were the Government of Myanmar and ALP (Arakan Liberation Party), Government of Myanmar and RSO (Rohingya Solidarity Organization). Whereas in the other states and regions, the number of violence was much higher than in the Rakhine state. On the other hand, the situation gets reversed from 2010 to 2017 (right side map). In only seven years, the number of State-based violence increased to 476. In this period, GoM and ALP, GoM and RSO, GoM and ARSA were involved in those acts of violence. However, in most of the other states and regions, the number of violence declined compared to the previous periods (UCDP Database).

Figure 7: State-based violence (1989-2009) and (2010-2017)



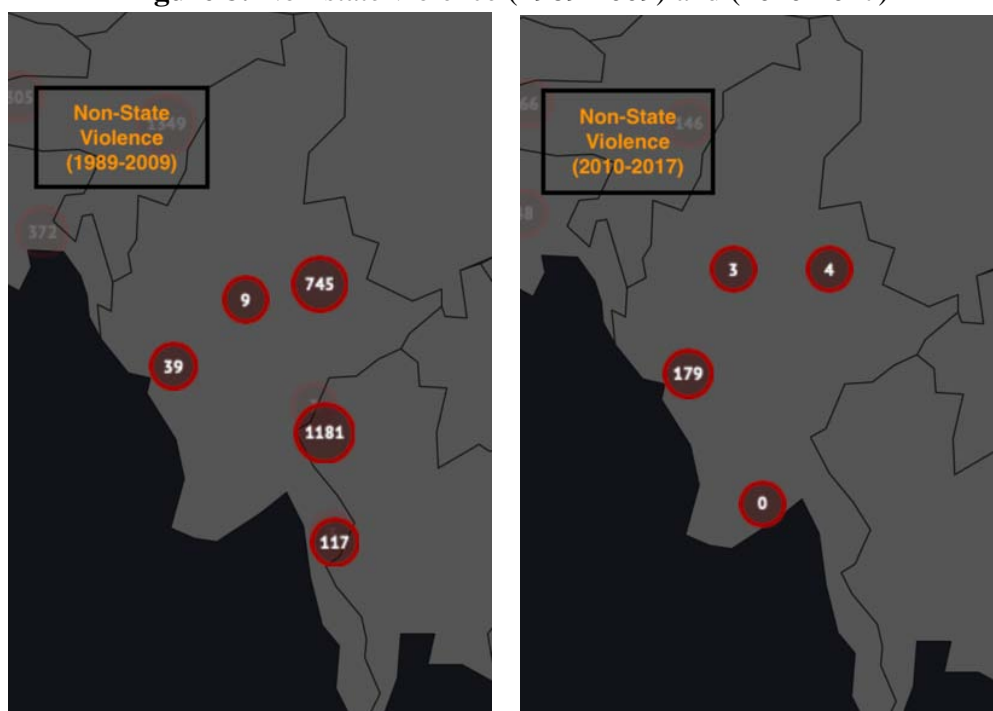
³ State-based violence (State-based armed conflict) refers to the fighting between two parties where one has to be the government force and the other a formally organised armed group (UCDP Definitions).

Source: UCDP Database.

2.3.1.2 Non-state violence

In the matter of Non-state violence⁴ (figure 8) in the Rakhine state, it can be seen that from 1989 to 2009 (left side map), the number of acts of violence reported was 39. On the other hand, from 2010 to 2017 in seven years it increased to 179 (right side map). On the contrary, in most of the other states and regions, the number of acts of violence declined significantly from 2010 to 2017. In both periods, the violence occurred between the Buddhist and Muslims in the Rakhine state.

Figure 8: Non-state violence (1989-2009) and (2010-2017)



Source: UCDP Database.

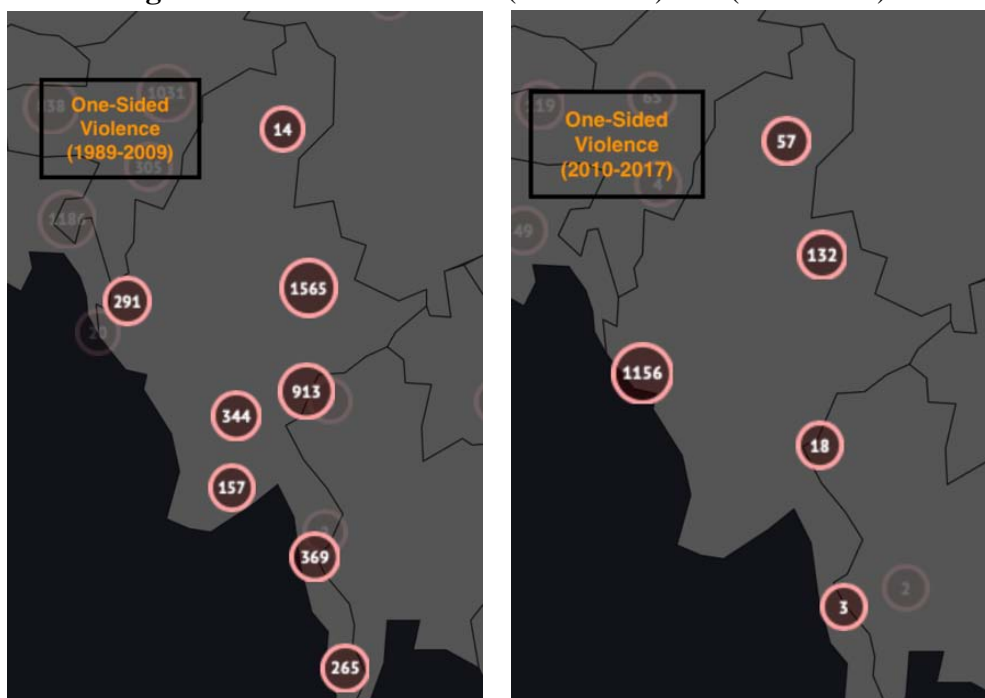
2.3.1.3 One-sided violence

The number of One-sided violence⁵ (figure 9) recorded in Rakhine state from 1989 to 2009 (left side map), was 291 between the Government of Myanmar and civilians. Notably, in these twenty years, the number of violence in the other states and regions was much higher than in the Rakhine state. However, the situation changed dramatically from 2010 to 2017 (right side map). In this seven year, the number of violence raised to 1156 in Rakhine state between the Government of Myanmar and civilians, ARSA and civilians. Contrarily, in the other states and regions, the number of violence decreased significantly.

⁴ Non-state violence (Non-state conflict) means none of the warring parties is the government of a state (UCDP Definitions).

⁵ One-sided violence refers to the unilateral use of armed force by either the government of a state or a formally organised group against the civilians (UCDP Definitions).

Figure 9: One-sided violence (1989-2009) and (2010-2017)



Source: UCDP Database.

As can be seen from the UCDP database, as compared with the other states and regions in Myanmar, the number of violence in Rakhine state has increased significantly over the last decades. All types of violence in the Rakhine state were much lesser than in the other states and regions from 1989 to 2009 in 20 years; however, the situation changed dramatically only in seven years from 2010 to 2017.

2.3.2 Destruction of Rohingya villages in the Rakhine state

Many organisations reported that since 2016, many Rohingya villages in Rakhine state have been burned down and destroyed intentionally. Especially, they have been burned down and destroyed starting from the period of the ‘clearance operation’ against ARSA by the military forces on October 2016 and August 2017. The security forces carried out extensive measures (burning and demolishing) in a deliberated and targeted manner to raze the Rohingyas homes, mosques and shops. (Amnesty International, 2018:4; HRW, 2016; Wells, 2018). The Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar provided the list of Tatmadaw officers who were responsible for atrocities during the 2017 ‘clearance operation’ (see annex V) (HRC, 2018:390-391). As well, Human Rights Watch identified the damage from only October 2016 to December 2016. During these three months, 1500 buildings have been destroyed. The Myanmar government and military force blamed the militants for burning down those villages, on the other hand, Human Rights Watch’s Asia director Brad Adams said: “The satellite imagery and eyewitness interviews clearly point the finger at the military for setting these buildings ablaze.” Further, he added, “It’s difficult to believe that militants burned down over 300 buildings in Wa Peik over a one-month period while Burmese security forces stood there and watched,” (HRW, 2016).

Significantly, the UNOSAT satellite image-based analysis, which mainly focused on Buthidaung, Maungdaw, Rathedaung township revealed that among the 993 villages and towns in these three townships, 392 villages and towns (40%) were affected, and estimated 37700 structures were destroyed. Among those villages, 134 villages and towns were destroyed less than 50%, 80 villages and towns more than 50% and 178 villages and towns eradicated completely (see table 1 and annex IV) (UNOSAT 2018:7).

Table 1: Number of affected villages and towns and estimated destroyed structures and level of destruction between 25 August 2017 and 18 March 2018.

Township	Total number of villages and towns (MIMU list)	Number of affected villages and towns (MIMU list)	% of villages affected	Estimated destroyed structures	Less than 50 % destroyed	More than 50% destroyed	Completely destroyed
Buthidaung	371	96	25	3,500	71	18	7
Maungdaw	399	277	70	31,300	59	62	156
Rathedaung	223	19	8	2,900	4	-	15
Total	993	392	40	37,700	134	80	178

Source: UNOSAT 2018:7

Noticeably, Myanmar authorities conducted large operations by using bulldozers to clear the burned villages. The satellite images discovered the signs of bulldozing or other types of terrain clear operations in 78 (approximately) out of 392 affected villages, and large-scale bulldozing on the entire destroyed villages (UNOSAT, 2018:10-11). The human rights advocates and the remaining Rohingya people in Rakhine state believe that the government was destroying the crime scenes before any credible investigation can occur. They were also destroying the remnants of the Rohingya culture to make it nearly impossible for them to return (Amnesty International, 2018:4; The Guardian 2018).

Moreover, there are signs of construction of new infrastructures. Both the UNOSAT and Amnesty International report revealed new infrastructures including houses, security force bases and large permanent structures in the previous destroyed Rohingya villages (UNOSAT, 2018:11; Amnesty International, 2018:3; Lewis, 2018). Amnesty International found new security force bases (under construction) in at least three places, two in Maungdaw Township and one in Buthidaung Township. In Buthidaung Township, the remaining Rohingyas were forced to leave their houses as the township authority confiscated their land to make Border Guard Police base (Amnesty International, 2018:7). Also, many new roads have been built in the abandoned land which directly goes through the heart of the Rohingya villages. Such as in Ratheduang township where the newly built road directly goes through the abandoned houses of Rohingyas. If those roads placement is permanent, then it will be harder for the Rohingyas

to return to their lands (Amnesty International, 2018:18). Major construction and expansion activities have been also observed in the northern Rakhine states around a mine and a new port and the planned Special Economic Zones (Amnesty International, 2018:21).

According to the GoM's claim, much of this work is part of the repatriation process of the Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh, and to rebuild the devastated region. The government also built transit centres and resettlements camps for the refugees. However, most of these infrastructures are surrounded by fence perimeter (Amnesty International, 2018:13-14; UNOSAT, 2018:13). The parliament of Myanmar approved \$15 million budget to construct the fence and related projects alongside the Bangladesh border in the Rakhine state (The Guardian, 2018). Amnesty International raised concerned about that "the Myanmar authorities are reshaping the region so as to accommodate more security forces and more non-Rohingya villagers, at the expense of homes, agricultural lands and villages where Rohingya have lived and farmed for generations". According to Amnesty International, a safe, voluntary and dignified return is uncertain without transparency, access and consultation with the Rohingyas and other communities living in the state (Amnesty International, 2018:3).

Similar to the GoM's claim, Myanmar's military force also claimed that they were protecting the country's unity, stability and sovereignty from the terrorists (Selth, 2018:3). China is also supporting the stance of the Myanmar government and clarifying that the military operations were necessary for Myanmar's national security. Further, China blocked or vetoed any resolutions that come against Myanmar (Strömberg, 2018:12; François and Souris, 2018:44). However, Ibrahim (2016:3) mentions that there is evidence that the old military regime funded and supported the extremist Buddhist groups to foster unrest. Many observers also believe that the Tatmadaw planned to expel all the Rohingyas from Rakhine state (Selth, 2018:3). Moreover, in case of taking back this Rohingyas, little has been done by the GoM. The conditions created by the Myanmar authority such as burning down houses, repressive laws are preventing the Rohingyas to go back (Parnini, 2013:288). The US Congressional Research Service Report in 2017 also highlights the same fact, where some observers mentioned that the displaced Rohingyas would not wish to return because of the safety, discriminatory laws and policies of Myanmar government (Martin et al., 2017:1).

3 Analysis

In this section, the analysis of the findings from the previous sections is presented to fulfil the research objectives. To analyse the findings, I use the analytical framework 'Vulnerability, risk and opportunity' of Le Billon, which is presented in the previous section (Conceptual and Analytical framework). This analytical framework which I summarised and visualised, shows that resources can provide both motive (resource control and exploitation) and opportunity (financial opportunities) to the actors (belligerents) for involving in a conflict. This can be interlinked with the case of recent Rohingya conflict in Rakhine state.

3.1 Resources which might provide Motive and Opportunity in recent Rohingya conflict

The central argument of Le Billon (2012:4) is that ‘resource sectors influence the likelihood and course of armed conflicts.’ He mentioned that some resources come up with specific opportunities, mostly financial related, and the resources which provide financial opportunities are more prone to armed conflicts than other resources (Le Billon, 2012:27). This is linked with the case of recent Rohingya conflict in Rakhine state and answer of the research questions. As indicated earlier, the Rakhine state holds a significant amount of natural resources. To be exact, among the 105 oil and gas fields that have been so far discovered in Myanmar, 25 of them are situated in the Rakhine state including the Shwe gas fields which contributed a lot in the export income of Myanmar (MIC, 2019:40, 99; EUROCHAM Myanmar, 2018:16).

Moreover, aside from natural resources in Rakhine state, there are many other growing business sectors presents such as fisheries and livestock, agriculture, manufacturing, energy, forestry, trade, construction, hotel and tourism which have vast economic potentials (MIC, 2019:13). Also, due to its location, the state has significant geostrategic importance to many other countries. The geographical location of the state also creates vast investment opportunity which provides substantial financial opportunities to many actors (MIC, 2019:37; ENAC, 2017:56). These resources, along with the economic opportunities might provide both motive and opportunity to the different actors in case of the recent Rohingya conflict. The possible motive and opportunity of specific actors are mentioned below.

3.1.1 Motive and Opportunity for GoM and Military force

Le Billon (2001) mentioned that economic agendas connected with exploitation of resources can influence the course of a conflict. Besides, financial self-interest also motivates individual soldiers, local commanders and their political backers to sustain the conflicts (Le Billon, 2001:578). This can be interlinked with the role and activities of the GoM and the military force (Tatmadaw) in case of the recent Rohingya conflict.

One may argue that in Rakhine state the natural resource always existed, so the question that arises here why pointing at the government and military force for the resource control and exploitation now? The point to be noticed here is that, in Rakhine state, the resources existed always; however, the government could not utilise it properly before. One reason behind is that, previously Myanmar was economically sanctioned (since the 1990s) by the western countries especially by the EU and the US due to lack of democracy and human rights violations (Garbo, 2016; Hadar, 1998; Martin et al., 2017:22). Its restricted Myanmar to sell natural resources to other countries. Secondly, because of the economic sanctions, no major companies could invest properly in Myanmar. But, the situation began to change, especially from 2008, when the military government of Myanmar amended the constitution and opened the door of democracy. Consequently, the EU and the US lifted the economic sanctions which withdrew all restrictions for the investors to invest within Myanmar. It could be seen in the case of Oil companies such as British Gas, Chevron and other companies who have failed to enter Myanmar before 2012, but after lifting the economic sanctions, they got the access. (NRGI, 2016 cited in Stokke, K.

et al., 2018:39). Moreover, along with the utilisation opportunity of natural resources, the new political and economic conditions which emerged after 2008 brought a massive amount of investment in the Rakhine state in different sectors such agriculture, manufacturing, energy and projects such as Special Economic Zone, Trading Zone, Industrial Zone (MIC, 2019: 13, 103-112).

As mentioned earlier, all these natural resources and projects are controlled and managed by the central government of Myanmar through different ministries. Such as the oil and natural gas are controlled by the Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE) under the Ministry of Electricity and Energy. Also, the officers of the MOGE are former and current military personals and both the MOGE and the military force are accused of land grabbing, extraction of natural resources and receiving illegal benefits from the resources (ENAC, 2017:17, 56-59; Sassen, 2017; Stokke et al. 2018:47). So, in the end, GoM and military force get the most benefits from the resources and the projects. It all became possible because the 2008 constitution of Myanmar grants the military some additional power and several key positions in the government which help the military to pressurise the government (Selth, 2018:11; The Economist, 2017; Stokke, K. et al., 2018:9, 14).

On the other hand, as argued by Le Billon (2012), the resource control and exploitation raise the risk of large-scale armed conflicts and can lead to war (Le Billon, 2012:26). It can be seen by observing the number of violence in Rakhine state over the two different periods from 1989 to 2009 and from 2010 to 2017. The UCDP database shows that every type of violence (State-Based Violence, Non-State Violence, One-Sided Violence) in the Rakhine state from 1989 to 2009 (twenty years) under the economically sanctioned military government was much lesser than in the other states and regions in Myanmar. Surprisingly, only in seven years from 2010 to 2017 under the comparatively open economic and democratic government, the violence in Rakhine state increased dramatically. Specifically, with regards to the State-based violence and One-sided violence where the Myanmar authority got involved as one of the actors, the number of violence increased significantly. From 1989 to 2009, State-based violence was recorded 50 which jumped to 476 in only seven years (2010 to 2017); and One-sided violence which was recorded 291 in 20 years (1989-2009) turns to 1156 only in seven years (2010-2017) (UCDP Database).

Furthermore, how the GoM and military force handle the Rohingya conflict can also be interlinked with Le Billon's argument where he connected resources with occurrences of violence such as militarization of resource areas, pollution or labour abuses (Le Billon, 2012:26). The Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar found plenty of evidence that the Tatmadaw was involved in killings, gang rapes and arson in Rakhine state, and the GoM did not take any necessary step to stop the violence (HRC, 2018). Even, the Myanmar authority deliberately burned down and demolished Rohingya people's houses and villages. Only in three villages and town, 37700 structures were destroyed (UNOSAT, 2018; Amnesty International, 2018).

With regards to repatriation, the other ethnic groups such as Karen and Karenni group who took shelter in Thailand, started to return to Myanmar as the UNHCR found that the condition of the south-eastern part of Myanmar is well enough for returning (UNHCR News, 2018). On the other hand, according to UNHCR, the condition of the Rakhine state is not conducive enough for the Rohingya refugees to return (ICG, 2018:2-3, HRW, 2019). Instead of taking necessary steps for returning the Rohingya people, the parliament of Myanmar allocated money (approved \$15 million budget) to construct the fence and related projects in the border of Bangladesh (The Guardian 2018). Moreover, the former President Thein Sein (President during 2011-2016) announced that the only solution to Rohingya conflict is to send back the Rohingyas to other countries or refugee camp (François and Souris, 2018:22). Also, releasing the convicted seven military officers in less than one year, who were sentenced to ten years of prison for killing Rohingya men and boys in Inn din village is sufficient enough to create doubt and suspicion about the intention of Myanmar authority (BBC, 2019). All these activities and roles of the GoM and military force indicated that they do not want that the Rohingyas ever return to Rakhine state. There is a strong possibility that the GoM and military force are involved in this conflict because of the resource control and exploitation. Also, the nature of treatment by Myanmar's previous military government with respect to other ethnic communities is a testimony to it.

However, it would be inappropriate to justify the roles and activities of the GoM and military by only addressing that, resource control and exploitation work as an influencing factor for the GoM and military force. The role and activities of GoM and military force were also influenced by some additional factors too. For example, the Burmese citizens do not accept the Rohingyas as they thought that the Rohingyas are a threat to their national and cultural identity and a competitor to their local business (Wolf, 2015; Goraya and Mazhar, 2016:34, 37). Also, that the extreme Buddhist group (969 movements, MaBaTha) perceived them as a threat to their religion. Additionally, the political parties, both the national (USDP, NLD) and regional parties (RNDP), support these extreme Buddhist group for their political gain (Ibrahim, 2016:13). All these factors principally backed the stance of GoM's and military force's roles and activities in the recent conflict.

3.1.2 Motive and Opportunity for China

As mentioned by Le Billon that resource wealth has an impact on the international community and due to the financial benefits from the resource wealth, international community often lacks cohesion, willingness or leverage to stop the conflict. In particular, access to the resource, works as a divisive factor among the international actors (Le Billon, 2001:578). The resource factor can be interlinked with the role of China in the recent Rohingya conflict.

The main interest of China in the Rakhine state is around the oil and gas fields (block AD-1, AD-6 and AD-8) and the huge investment that they have already been made in the region. According to the report of Myanmar Investment Commission (MIC), China's invested amount in Myanmar is 20,353.528 million USD until December 2018, which makes China the largest investor in Myanmar (MIC, 2019:27,99). Notably, in the Belt and Road Initiative's, China invests a considerable amount of money, and the significant portion of it is vested in the

Rakhine state. Markedly, the Myanmar-China Oil and gas pipeline project, Kyaukphyu Special Economic Zone, deep-sea port and China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC), Kunming-Kyaukpyu railway project (ENAC, 2017:56; MIC, 2019:103; Blanchard, 2018:333, 339). All these projects are expected to bring substantial financial benefits to China.

Moreover, the geographical location of the Rakhine state is also very crucial to China as they want a safe transport route for the oil and gas exported from the Middle-east and Africa; so that, China can avoid the Malacca Strait and the South China Sea in the crisis period. Mainly, the Oil and Gas pipeline save a lot of transport cost and time for China. Also, the signed China-Myanmar Economic Corridor, which planned to connect China's landlocked Yunnan province with Rakhine state will also financially benefit both the countries. Additionally, these projects are constructed by the Chinese state-owned companies such as CITIC (Kyaukphyu SEZ and deep-sea port), CNPC (oil and gas pipeline), which ultimately benefit China in a significant way. Further, to complete all these projects, China needs the support of the GoM as some of these projects require vast lands, and some projects are controversial on environmental issue. For example, in the oil and gas pipeline project the local peoples did not agree to give up their lands, and further, many others raised concerns about the environmental impacts of the oil and gas pipelines (ENAC, 2017:64).

Therefore, to fulfil all this vision, China needs constant support and safeguard from the GoM and in return along with economic benefits from the projects, China is supporting the GoM as it can be seen in the case of Rohingya conflict where China backed the Myanmar government. Previously, China defended Myanmar with the veto power in the UN Security Council when the UK and the USA raised the resolution 1674 (Responsibly to protect) (Azad and Jasmin, 2013:33). And now they are defending Myanmar from the criticism of the International community by addressing the Rohingya conflict as Myanmar's internal sovereign affair (Joy, 2018:4). It can be said that in case of the recent Rohingya conflict, even though China is not directly involved in the conflict; however, the economic opportunities and huge investments are stopping them from playing an active role to stop the conflict.

3.1.3 Motive and Opportunity for India

The same explanation by Le Billon (2001:578) that resource wealth which provides financial benefits and has an impact on the international community regarding the willingness of stopping a conflict can be monitored in the role of India too in the recent Rohingya conflict. India played a very silent role in the recent Rohingya conflict. Neither it directly supports, nor it strictly condemns the GoM and military force for the atrocities. India abstained herself from the voting at UNHCR on the resolution brought out by Bangladesh for an independent international mechanism to probe abuses in Myanmar's Rakhine State. India also opposed the preliminary inquiry of the International Criminal Court (ICC) on forced deportation of hundreds of thousands of Rohingyas from Rakhine state (Bhuyan, 2018).

India maintains a good neighbouring relationship with Myanmar, especially after when the military government switched to democracy from military rule. Presently, India's main interest in Myanmar is based on the Act East policy, like China's interest hovering around by the BRI.

From India's perspective, in the east, there is a vast trading opportunity with the ASEAN and other East Pacific countries which could bring substantial financial benefits, and only Myanmar has the physical connection between India and the east (Ramya, 2018). Moreover, the North-eastern region of India is isolated (landlocked) from the main part of India, which restrains the central government in terms of trades, politics and security. Further, to utilize the trading opportunity with the east and to connect the North-east region of India with the mainland, India is doing several projects with Myanmar. For example, the GoI already built a port in Sittwe under the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project which will connect India's Kolkata with Myanmar's Sittwe by the sea route and from Sittwe it will connect India by road. Notably, this project is financed by GoI and is situated in the Rakhine state (MIC, 2019: 107).

India is also planning to build a cross-border gas pipeline, and many Indian companies are holding stakes in the Shwe gas field (Yhome, 2018:3). Moreover, there are also many other projects such as the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway, Rhi-Tiddim and Rhi-Falan Roads which would help India to enter the market of East Asia (Ziipao, 2018:481-483). Besides, India has a competitive relationship with China and is also highly concerned about China's BRI projects in Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Pakistan, all of which are located near Indian territory (Funairole and Hillman 2018:2; Kanwal, 2018:12).

Furthermore, to accomplish the vision of the Act East policy and overcome the challenges of the North-eastern region and counter China, Myanmar holds an essential position in GoI's policy. Mainly, the Rakhine state is very crucial for the trading opportunity with the East Asian countries and transport connection. Similar to China, India also addressed the conflict as Myanmar's internal affair and condemned ARSA's attack. India continues to remain silent on the Rohingya refugee crisis and actively pursue a good relationship with Myanmar's army officials (Yhome, 2018:3, 4; BBC, 2018). India is even selling combat equipment to the Myanmar military force (Choudhury, 2019). It can be assumed that India also does not want to hamper the relationship with GoM over the Rohingya issue as it has many interests in Myanmar.

4 Conclusion

Myanmar is the home of various ethnic nationalities; however, all the ethnic groups are not treated equally in this country. Some of the ethnic groups face severe discrimination and oppression by the government authority. Among some of these ethnic groups, the conditions of the Rohingyas are the worst. Regarding the recent Rohingya conflict, the government has not responded in good faith to the global concern over the treatment of the Rohingyas. The GoM is trying to portray the recent conflict as a type of conflict which emerged from the ethnic and religious differences and eventually turned into communal violence between the Rohingya Muslims and Rakhine Buddhists. Further, the GoM and military force are justifying their roles and activities which forcibly displaced hundreds of thousands of Rohingyas from their residence by stating that the military force was fighting the terrorist organization group ARSA. China and India also supported the GoM's stance and addressed it as Myanmar's internal affair. There is no denying the fact that, the ethnic and religious differences, social and cultural differences, 1982 citizenship law, national and regional politics, ARSA's attack etc. all played a crucial role in fomenting the conflict. However, there is more to be added to it; the geopolitical

economic interests that are vested in Rakhine state. This is perhaps the underlying reason behind the massive re-escalation of the recent Rohingya conflict.

Most importantly, the role of the GoM throughout the conflict is highly controversial and not sufficient enough to stop the conflict. Also, there is clear evidence that the military force directly got involved in the atrocious crime and in deliberately destroying the Rohingya villages in Rakhine state. Furthermore, the role of neighbouring China and India in diffusing the violence was not adequate too. Without solving and addressing the conflict adequately, China and India limited themselves in their self-interest's in Myanmar. There is a high probability that the benefits of the resources and economic opportunities restrain China and India from playing an active role to stop the conflict and condemn the GoM and military force for their negative role and activities.

To conclude the paper, although there is no direct evidence that the recent Rohingya conflict is the result of geopolitical economic interests of the concerned actors, however, looking into the findings and analysis of this study, it can be said that the role of various actors, including the GoM, Military force, China and India, need to be examined more in-depth. Further extensive research should be done on the Rohingya issue from the perspective of the geopolitical economy of resources. The world must need to know the underlying reason behind the recent conflict. Without knowing and adequately addressing the underlying problem, no conflict, including the Rohingya conflict, can be solved permanently.

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